

The *Tao* and the *Logos:* Notes on Derrida's Critique of Logocentrism

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"It is an advantage when a language possesses an abundance of logical expressions, that is, specific and separate expressions for the thought determinations themselves; many prepositions and articles denote relationships based on thought." So Hegel declares ex cathedra in his preface to the second edition of *Science of Logic*. "The Chinese language," the philosopher continues with unjustified assurance, "is supposed not to have developed to this stage or only to an inadequate extent"; he then exalts German for having "many advantages over other modern languages; some of its words even possess the further peculiarity of having not only different but opposite meanings."[1] It seems that a tradition exists in the West that readily recognizes the superiority of German as a medium for philosophy. Martin Heidegger, for instance, maintains that German, along with Greek, "is (in regard to its possibilities for thought) at once the most powerful and most spiritual of all languages."[2] For Hegel, the advantage of a logical language is shown by its prepositions and articles; so he can ignore the Chinese language precisely because Chinese has few prepositions, as compared with German, and no articles at all. Logical and grammatical relations are indicated in Chinese mainly by word order, without recourse to any change of sound or form in the words themselves. It is interesting to note that while Hegel considers this lack of inflection in Chinese to be a defect, Ernst Cassirer regards it as "the only truly adequate means of expressing grammatical relations. For it would seem possible to designate them more clearly and specifically *as* relations pure and simple, possessing no perceptual base of their own, through the

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pure *relation* of words expressed in their order, than by special words and affixes."[3]

Hegel takes pride in the German language for still another reason, however; certain German words embody the Hegelian dialectics by possessing not only different but opposite meanings. The classic example which demonstrates this claim for the philosophical superiority of German is, of course, the protean word *Aufhebung,* which means both "preserving" and "putting an end to," or "coming-to-be" and "ceasing-to-be," the wonderful "one and the same word for two opposite meanings."[4] One may perhaps add another example by quoting Heinrich Heine's story of a French lady who, looking at him with wide-open eyes, incredulously and in anxious fear, said, "I know you Germans use the same word for pardoning and poisoning." In fact she is right (Und in der Tat sie hat Recht), as Heine assures us, "for the word *Vergeben* means both."[5] Nonetheless, words with opposite meanings are not exclusively under German monopoly. Stephen Ullmann, for instance, mentions "a special case of bisemy" where we find "*antonymous senses* attached to the same name," and the examples he gives include the Latin *sacer* and the French *sacré,* meaning both "sacred" and "accursed."[6]

But what about Chinese, the ideographic language supposedly underdeveloped and inadequate for the purpose of metaphysical meditation? In the first few pages of the first volume of *Guan Zhui Bian* [Pipe-awl chapters], Qian Zhongshu takes issue with Hegel and demonstrates with formidable erudition and a wealth of examples how some of the Chinese characters may simultaneously possess three, four, or even five different and contradictory meanings.[7] The Chinese character *yi,* for instance, could mean "conciseness" or "change" or "constancy"; therefore the famous *Yi Jing,* or *I Ching,* may as readily be translated as "Concise Book of Constancy" instead of as its better-known title, the *Book of Changes,* since it is essentially a book about changeless presence in a world of always changing configuration. It is true that the dialectic reciprocity of opposite terms is a theme overly reiterated in ancient Chinese writing, but Hegel discredits it as a primitive dialectics, abstract, superficial, always going round in a circle of immobilism, exteriority, and naturality.[8] For Hegel, the ideal possession of knowledge, logic, or truth is attained when truth or *logos* is consciously grasped not as unreflective emotional knowledge but as articulated logical knowledge, as self-presence of self-consciousness. He is too much of a rationalist to celebrate the sort of intuitive presence of oriental philosophy, which seems to him passive and futile, mere force

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without actual expression. "The force of mind is only as great as its expression; its depth only as deep as its power to expand and lose itself when spending and giving out its substance."[9] When self-consciousness seeks expression in language, however, it suffers from the necessary process of alienation, for language as a means of expression conceals as much as it reveals, always threatening to dilute or distort the inner in the process of externalization:

> Language and labour are outer expressions in which the individual no longer retains possession of himself *per se,* but lets the inner get right outside him, and surrenders it to something else. For that reason we might just as truly say that these outer expressions express the inner too much as that they do so too little.[10]

At this stage of the development of self-consciousness, language and labor are alienated from the mouth that speaks, the hand that works, and the other operative organs of the individual, and they are what Hegel terms "physiognomy and phrenology." Nevertheless, Hegel does not so much devalue language per se as he rejects its outer form, which is writing. In living speech, the inner self acquires the form of reality and becomes immediately present,

> the form in which *qua* language it exists to be its content, and possesses authority, *qua* spoken word. . . . Ego *qua* this particular pure ego is non-existent otherwise; in every other mode of expression it is absorbed in some concrete actuality, and appears in a shape from which it can withdraw; it turns reflectively back into itself, away from its act, as well as from its physiognomic expression, and leaves such an incomplete existence (in which there is always at once too much as well as too little), lying soulless behind. Speech, however, contains this ego in its purity; it alone expresses I, I itself.[11]

In contradistinction to the spoken word, the written form of language seems to provide a concrete, finite, and dispensable shape in which the self is not immediately present and the personal voice is not heard. For Hegel, an ideographic language like Chinese is exemplary of such concrete actuality with little or no potential for metaphysical thinking, whereas German and Western alphabetic writing at large exist, as it were, merely for the purpose of registering the sound, the voice, the phone, and so are by far the better form of writing. He considers the Chinese written language inferior because it "does not express, as ours does, individual sounds—does not present the spoken words to the eye, but represents (*Vorstellen*) the ideas themselves by signs."[12]

In a wholesale destructive or deconstructive critique of Western philosophical tradition, it is precisely this ethnocentric-phonocentric view of language that Jacques Derrida has chosen for his target. In Derrida's

critique, Hegel appears as one of the powerful enactors of that tradition yet peculiarly on the verge of turning away from it as "the last philosopher of the book and the first thinker of writing."[13] As Derrida sees it, phonocentrism in its philosophical dimension is also "*logocentrism:* the metaphysics of phonetic writing" (p. 3). Derrida makes it quite clear that such logocentrism is related to Western thinking and to Western thinking alone. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points this out in the translator's preface to *Of Grammatology:* "Almost by a reverse ethnocentrism, Derrida insists that logocentrism is a property of the *West.* . . . Although something of the Chinese prejudice of the West is discussed in Part I, the *East* is never seriously studied or deconstructed in the Derridean text" (p. lxxxii). As a matter of fact, not only is the East never seriously deconstructed but Derrida even sees in the nonphonetic Chinese writing "the testimony of a powerful movement of civilization developing outside of all logocentrism" (p. 90). When he looks within the Western tradition for a breakthrough, he finds it in nothing other than the poetics of Ezra Pound and his mentor, Ernest Fenollosa, who built a graphic poetics on what is certainly a peculiar reading of Chinese ideograms:

> This is the meaning of the work of Fenellosa [*sic*] whose influence upon Ezra Pound and his poetics is well-known: this irreducibly graphic poetics was, with that of Mallarmé, the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition. The fascination that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound's writing may thus be given all its historical significance. [P. 92]

Since Chinese is a living language with a system of nonphonetic script that functions very differently from that of any Western language, it naturally holds a fascination for those in the West who, weary of the Western tradition, try to find an alternative model on the other side of the world, in the Orient. This is how the so-called Chinese prejudice came into being at the end of the seventeenth and during the eighteenth centuries, when some philosophers in the West, notably Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, saw "in the recently discovered Chinese script a model of the philosophical language thus removed from history" and believed that "what liberates Chinese script from the voice is also that which, arbitrarily and by the artifice of invention, wrenches it from history and gives it to philosophy" (p. 76). In other words, what Leibniz and others saw in the Chinese language was what they desired and projected there, "a sort of European hallucination," as Derrida rightly terms it. "And the hallucination translated less an ignorance than a misunderstanding. It was not disturbed by the knowledge of Chinese script, limited but real, which was then available" (p. 80).

Now the question that may be put to the contemporary effort to deconstruct the metaphysics of phonetic writing is whether such an effort

has safely guarded itself against the same prejudice or hallucination that annulled the Leibnizian project and finally trapped it in the old snare of logocentrism. A more fundamental question that necessarily follows is whether or not logocentrism is symptomatic only of Western metaphysics, that is, whether the metaphysics of Western thinking is really different from that of Eastern thinking and is not simply the way thinking is constituted and works. If, as Spivak suggests, "this phonocentrism-logocentrism relates to centrism itself—the human desire to posit a 'central' presence at beginning and end," then how can such a desire ever be successfully suppressed or totally choked off, however much the deconstructionists try (p. lxviii)? In other words, if logocentrism is found present in the East as well as in the West, in nonphonetic as well as in phonetic writing, how is it possible for us to break away from, or through, its enclosure?

Since Derrida has given credit to Fenollosa and Pound for accomplishing "the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition," looking into this break ought to be a convenient way of understanding the deconstructive enterprise. Fenollosa's influence upon Pound and his poetics is well known indeed; but among people who know Chinese and therefore can judge the matter, it is well known to be a misleading influence insofar as it concerns sinology. Under that influence, Pound's understanding of the Chinese script is notoriously shaky and whimsical. A note in the Derridean text leads us to the statement that "Fenollosa recalled that Chinese poetry was essentially a script" (p. 334 n.44). Fenollosa's idea is that Chinese poetry, written in ideograms that he believed to be "shorthand pictures of actions and processes," explores the pictorial values of the characters to the utmost.[14] Each line becomes a string of thought-pictures or images that bring the independent visual aspect of the sign into prominence. Following this concept, Pound dissected the Chinese script into its pictographic components and was fascinated by the images he discovered there. For example, the Chinese character *xi* [習] is composed of two elements, a "feather" on top of "white." It does not mean "white feather," however, but "to practice." This character appears in the first sentence of the *Confucian Analects*, which could be translated as: "The Master says: to learn and to practice from time to time—is this not a joy?" In his fervent anatomy of Chinese script, however, Pound seized upon the feather image and rendered the line as: "Study with the seasons winging past, is not this pleasant?"[15] In Chinese the word *xi*, or "practice," is often preceded by the word *xue*, or "learn," and as the sinologist George Kennedy wittily comments,

> The repeated idea is that learning is fruitless unless one puts it into practice. Pound sacrifices this rather important precept for the sake of a pastoral where the seasons go winging by. Undoubtedly this is fine poetry. Undoubtedly it is bad translation. Pound has the practice,

> but not the learning. He is to be saluted as a poet, but not as a translator.[16]

In a totally different context and with different intention, T. S. Eliot also denied Pound the title of translator. He predicted that Pound's *Cathay* "will be called (and justly) a 'magnificent specimen of XXth Century poetry' rather than a 'translation.' "[17] With his notion of tradition as the corpus of all the canonical works simultaneously shaping and being shaped by the new work of art, Eliot tried to place Pound in the tradition of European literature, identifying Robert Browning, William Butler Yeats, and many others as predecessors who had exercised strong influence on Pound's work. As for Chinese, Eliot insisted that what appeared in Pound's work was not so much Chinese per se as a version or vision of Chinese from the Poundian perspective. The well-known and pretty little aphorism that "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" catches more insight than perhaps Eliot himself was aware of.[18] The point is that neither Pound nor Fenollosa should be regarded as free from the sort of Chinese prejudice that Derrida has detected in Leibniz, because for them, as for Leibniz more than two centuries earlier, "what liberates Chinese script from the voice is also that which, arbitrarily and by the artifice of invention, wrenches it from history and gives it to [poetry]."

Curiously enough, just as Hegel alleged that "the reading of hieroglyphs is for itself a deaf reading and a mute writing," so Fenollosa believed that "in reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be *watching things* work out their own fate."[19] The pros and cons here are equally misconceived: reading Chinese is, like reading any other language, a linguistic act of comprehending the meaning of a succession of signs, either with silent understanding or with utterance of the sounds; it is not an archaeological act of digging up some obscure etymological roots from underneath a thick layer of distancing abstraction. Derrida reminds us with Ernest Renan that "in the most ancient languages, the words used to designate foreign peoples are drawn from two sources: either words that signify 'to stammer,' 'to mumble,' or words that signify 'mute.' "[20] This practice, however, seems by no means solely ancient, for did not Hegel in the nineteenth century and Fenollosa in the twentieth take Chinese for a mute language? The irony in Hegel's case is that he probably did not know that his favorite German *Muttersprache* is called in Russian *nemetskij jazyk,* which literally means "language of the dumb." As for Fenollosa, it is almost unnecessary to point out that Chinese poetry is essentially *not* a script to be deciphered but a song to be chanted, depending for its effect on a highly complicated tonal pattern. In discussing Fenollosa and Pound with special reference to Derrida's statement in *Of Grammatology,* Joseph Riddel recognizes Fenollosa's "incoherence or blindness that permits him . . . to forget that his own reading of the ideogram is a purely western idealization."[21] This seems to call Derrida's

statement into question and put "the first break" in the Western tradition back into that tradition.

Putting aside the whole problem of Chinese prejudice, "European hallucination," or "western idealization," we may try to understand some fundamental Chinese philosophical notions on their own ground. The first and foremost of these is undoubtedly the concept of the *tao,* which dominates Chinese thinking in many aspects and is sometimes translated into English as "way."[22] Now the Chinese character *tao* (or *dao*) is a polyseme of which "way" is only one possible meaning. It is very important and especially relevant to our purpose here to note that the word *tao* as used in the *Lao Tzu* has two other meanings: "thinking" (reason) and "speaking" (speech). Thus the first sentence of the *Lao Tzu* is punning upon these two meanings:

> The *tao* that can be *tao*-ed ["spoken of"]
> Is not the constant *tao;*
> The name that can be named
> Is not the constant name.
>
> [Chap. 1][23]

As puns are usually untranslatable, the two meanings of the *tao* are hardly discernible in English translation, even though the neatly parallel structure of the next sentence may give one some idea. According to Lao Tzu the philosopher, the *tao* is both immanent and transcendent; it is the begetter of all things, therefore it is not and cannot be named after any of these things. In other words, the *tao* is the ineffable, the "mystery upon mystery" beyond the power of language (chap. 1). Even the name *tao* is not a name in itself: "I know not its name / So I style it 'the *tao*' "; "The *tao* is for ever nameless" (chaps. 25, 32). The totality of the *tao* is kept intact only in knowing silence; hence the famous paradox that "One who knows does not speak; one who speaks does not know" (chap. 56). One might protest that the *Lao Tzu,* despite its extreme conciseness, is after all a "book of five thousand characters."

The paradox, however, as though anticipated, may be partly reconciled by the legendary genesis of the book, as recorded by the great historian Sima Qian (145?–90? B.C.) in the biography of Lao Tzu:

> Lao Tzu cultivated the *tao* and virtue, and his teachings aimed at self-effacement. He lived in Chou for a long time, but seeing its decline he departed; when he reached the Pass, the Keeper there was pleased and said to him, "As you are about to leave the world behind, could you write a book for my sake?" As a result, Lao Tzu wrote a work in two books, setting out the meaning of the *tao* and virtue in some five thousand characters, and then departed. None knew where he went to in the end.[24]

We learn from the story that the *Lao Tzu* was written at the request and for the benefit of the Pass Keeper, who was apparently not a philosopher capable of intuitive knowledge of the mysterious *tao*. In order to enlighten him and the world, Lao Tzu was confronted with the difficult task of speaking the unspeakable and describing the indescribable. As one of the commentators, Wei Yuan (1794–1856), explains,

> The *tao* cannot be manifested through language, nor be found by following its trace in name. At the coercive request of the Pass Keeper, he was obliged to write the book, so he earnestly emphasized, at the very moment he began to speak, the extreme difficulty of speaking of the *tao*. For if it could be defined and given a name, it would then have a specific meaning, but not the omnipresent true constancy.[25]

That is to say, at the very beginning of his writing, Lao Tzu emphasizes the inadequacy and even futility of writing, and he does so by playing on the meanings of the *tao:* that the *tao* as thinking denies the *tao* as speaking, and yet the two are interlocked in the same word. It is very interesting to note the coincidence—perhaps more than mere coincidence—that *logos* in Greek has exactly the same two meanings of thinking (*Denken*) and speaking (*Sprechen*).[26]

Of course, suspicion about the inadequacy of linguistic expression has always inhabited the Western philosophical tradition. In discussing the relation of language and reality, Cassirer describes the view traditional since Plato, using terms very similar to those Hegel used to condemn language as outer expression for expressing the inner both too much and too little:

> For all mental processes fail to grasp reality itself, and in order to represent it, to hold it at all, they are driven to the use of symbols. But all symbolism harbors the curse of mediacy; it is bound to obscure what it seeks to reveal. Thus the sound of *speech* strives to "express" subjective and objective happening, the "inner" and the "outer" world; but what of this it can retain is not the life and individual fullness of existence, but only a dead abbreviation of it. All that "denotation" to which the spoken word lays claim is really nothing more than mere suggestion; a "suggestion" which, in face of the concrete variegation and totality of actual experience, must always appear a poor and empty shell. That is true of the external as well as the inner world: "When *speaks* the soul, alas, the *soul* no longer speaks!"[27]

The last sentence is a quotation from Friedrich Schiller; poets, indeed, are concerned as much as philosophers about the problem of verbal communication. This concern is certainly not limited to either the East

or the West alone—we find conceptual oppositions like inner/outer, thought/speech, signified/signifier, and so forth, not only in the *logos* but also in the *tao.* In spite of his intention to emphasize the discrepancy between thinking and speaking, Lao Tzu's punning on the word *tao* reminds us rather of the very close relationship between the two. In his essay "Man and Language," Hans-Georg Gadamer also reminds us that the Greek word *logos,* though often rendered as "reason" or "thinking," originally and chiefly means "language," and that man as *animal rationale* (*das vernünftige Lebewesen*) is actually "animal that has language" (*das Lebewesen, das Sprache hat*).[28] The many examples Qian Zhongshu has culled from authors in the Chinese and the Western traditions powerfully argue for the universality of the logical structure of thinking, even though its specific formulation may vary in degree at different times and places; in his comment on the pun in the *Lao Tzu,* Qian explicitly points out the comparability of the *tao* with the *logos.* If we shake off Hegelian prejudice and Leibnizian hallucination and think of language in terms of verbal communication, we shall be able to understand better the common and basic principles that underlie the two great civilizations of the world. We shall be able to help bridge the gulf that seems to be so insurmountable between the East and the West. Indeed, there is no reason why Plato should not be considered as in harmonious company with Lao Tzu in the contemplation of the *logos* or the *tao.* In one of his philosophical epistles, Plato maintains that "no intelligent man will ever be so bold as to put into language those things which his reason has contemplated, especially into a form that is unalterable. Names, I maintain, are in no case stable." "This passage," says Qian after quoting it, "may almost be translated to annotate the *Lao Tzu.*"[29]

According to Derrida, metaphysical conceptualization always proceeds by hierarchies: "In a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis,* but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand."[30] In the case of language, the metaphysical hierarchy is formed when meaning dominates speech and speech dominates writing. Derrida finds this hierarchy in the Western tradition since the time of Plato and Aristotle, especially in the notion of phonetic writing as the first and primary signifier:

> If, for Aristotle, for example, "spoken words . . . are the symbols of mental experience . . . and written words are the symbols of spoken words" (*De interpretatione,* 1, 16a 3) it is because the voice, producer of *the first symbols,* has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind. [P. 11]

This Aristotelian hierarchy seems to apply, however, not only to phonetic writing but to nonphonetic as well. When we look at the oldest Chinese

dictionary, the *Suowen Jiezi* (second century A.D.), we find the same hierarchy in the very definition of *ci* ("word"), which is described as "meaning inside and speech outside." This hierarchy emerges even more explicitly in a much earlier work, the appendixes to the *Book of Changes,* where a well-known passage reads: "Writing cannot fully convey the speech, and speech cannot fully convey the meaning."[31] Here the debasement of writing is based on the same considerations as in the West: written words are secondary signifiers; they are further removed than speech from what is conceived in the interiority of the mind, and they constitute a dead and empty shell from which the living voice is absent. "The epoch of the logos thus debases writing considered as mediation of mediation and as a fall into the exteriority of meaning" (pp. 12–13). Exactly! That is precisely why the wheelwright in the *Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu)* told the Duke of Huan that "what you are reading, my lord, is nothing but the dregs of the ancients."[32] For Zhuangzi as for Aristotle, words are external and dispensable; they should be cast aside once their meaning, content, or signified has been extracted.

> It is for the fish that the trap exists; once you've got the fish, you forget the trap. It is for the hare that the snare exists; once you've got the hare, you forget the snare. It is for the meaning that the word exists; once you've got the meaning, you forget the word. Where can I find the man who will forget words so that I can have a word with him?[33]

Compare this with Heraclitus' fragment 36, "listening not to me but to the logos," and with Ludwig Wittgenstein's metaphor at the end of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* that the reader who has comprehended his propositions should throw them away as he should, so to speak, "throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it."[34] The dichotomy of meaning and word, content and form, intention and expression, and so forth, is deeply rooted in the thinking of both the East and the West. Derrida would call it the logocentric logic of the supplement because words can be cast aside and forgotten as supplement, as simple exteriority, pure addition or pure absence. "*What is added is nothing because it is added to a full presence to which it is exterior.* Speech comes to be added to intuitive presence (of the entity, of *essence,* of the *eidos,* of *ousia,* and so forth); writing comes to be added to living self-present speech; masturbation comes to be added to so-called normal sexual experience; culture to nature, evil to innocence, history to origin, and so on" (p. 167). It is noticeable that "intuitive presence" is mentioned here as the metaphysical origin. In his book on deconstruction, Jonathan Culler also includes "spontaneous or unmediated intuition" in an enumeration of "familiar concepts that depend on the value of presence."[35] Since intuition is what Taoism emphasizes, since the oriental way of thinking is supposedly more

intuitive than analytical and keeps the totality of the world untouched by the process of logical abstraction, this contrast between intuition and expression already includes the East in the tradition of the metaphysics of presence. Logocentrism, therefore, does not inhabit just the Western way of thinking; it constitutes the very way of thinking itself.

If that is the case, is there then any other way that thinking may operate beyond or outside the enclosure of logocentrism? Derrida himself seems to doubt the possibility when he says that, operating necessarily from the inside and unable to isolate the elements and atoms of the old structure, "deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work" (p. 24). The elements and atoms are so much constituent of the whole structure of thinking, every bit of it, that it becomes impossible for the deconstructionist to single out one element or atom of thinking and purge the rest of logocentrism. Derrida takes great pains to coin new words which might, one hopes, take on meanings yet uncontaminated by the old structure of metaphysical thinking—words like *trace, archi-écriture* and, most notably, *différance.* He then hastens to insist that *différance,* like the other Derridean terms, "is literally neither a word nor a concept"; meanwhile his vocabulary keeps moving on to some newer coinage.[36] Nevertheless, such painstaking effort seems to be of little avail, and the terminology of deconstruction simply becomes another set of terminology in due time, that is, both words and concepts. The only way out of such a circle seems to lie in giving up the feat of naming altogether, and leaving all those nonconceptual terms unnamed. Yet even that would hardly be the solution, since it would be going to the other end of logocentrism, indeed the oldest form of it, that is, the unnamed and unnamable *tao* or *logos* itself.

On the other hand, the terms of deconstruction become interesting and useful when they begin to function as words and concepts. Difference, for example, plays a very vital part in the strategy of deconstructing the metaphysical hierarchy in language. By pushing further Ferdinand de Saussure's proposition that "in the linguistic system there are only differences *without positive terms,*"[37] Derrida proves that the meaning or the signified is never a transcendental, self-contained presence, never an entity that becomes visible in the form of a signifier but, like the signifier, is always already a trace, a mark of the absence of a presence, and therefore a trace always "under erasure." Language as sign system is but a system of different and mutually defining terms, and this is true in speaking as well as in writing. Therefore there is no ground on which the superiority of speech to writing, of the phonetic to the nonphonetic, could be established. The Chinese script, by being nonphonetic, does tend to overturn the hierarchy, and there is something in it that does appeal to the Derridean grammatology. In the legendary account of its origin, Chinese writing is never conceived as a mere recording of oral speech but as originating independently of speech; writing imitates the

pattern of the traces left by birds and animals on the ground or by natural phenomena in general. A widespread tradition has it that when the creator of the script, Cangjie, invented writing by observing such patterns, "millet grains rained down from heaven and the ghosts wailed at night." A commentator explains that the invention of writing marked the loss of innocence and the beginning of guile and that "heaven foreknew that people were to starve, so it let millet grain rain down; and the ghosts were afraid to be condemned by written verdict, so they wailed at night."[38] On the one hand, the commentator here conceives of writing as the loss of innocence that incurs great disasters, and, on the other hand, he recognizes that man has gained power in writing to such an extent that even the ghosts are afraid of him. It is interesting to note that the same passage has recently been reinterpreted in the light of modern archaeology and anthropology by K. C. Chang, who understands the raining of millet grain and the wailing of the ghosts as one of the "very few happy incidents" described in ancient Chinese mythology and considers Chinese writing "the path to authority."[39]

The power of Chinese writing is certainly substantiated by the large amount of inscriptions on pottery or bronze utensils, on tortoise shells or oracle bones, on bamboo slips or stone tablets. There is further evidence in the importance and high prestige which the Chinese accord calligraphy as a traditional form of art and in the predominant influence of ancient writing as canonical classics. Anyone who has visited a Chinese palace, temple, or garden can hardly fail to notice the manifold inscribed characters on the gates, pillars, and walls. Anyone who has seen a Chinese painting knows that writing and the seal-stamp form an integral part of the finished picture. Indeed, as it is created by observing the pattern of traces, Chinese writing tends to project the nature or quality of trace in writing better than any phonetic writing does and thus reveals language as a system of differential terms. Nothing abides but writing; even the debasement of writing has to survive in writing; even philosophical writing turns out to be no less (if not more) ironic or rhetorical than poetic writing. In spite of Zhuangzi's advice to forget the word, it is his words that have made him best remembered, and his advice functions against itself as irony, as a poetic trope or metaphor. Many people read Zhuangzi as one of the greatest prose writers in classical Chinese literature; they admire the grandeur of his imagination and the beauty of his language, even though they do not care about his Taoist ideology. That is to say, people tend to remember his words while forgetting his meaning. The rhetorical question Zhuangzi asked himself—"Where can I find the man who will forget words so that I can have a word with him?"—seems to indicate that he knew he was never to find such a man. His philosophy of self-effacement, like that of Lao Tzu, is overturned by his own writing. The convention in ancient China of naming a book after its author and the settled practice of ancient writers quoting earlier writings almost transform

the writings of philosophers like Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi into something like sourcebooks, origins of authority, ultimate texts of reference in the intertextuality of Chinese writing. It is quite true that almost every ancient Chinese text is an intertext, but an intertext significantly different from that understood in deconstructive criticism. While a deconstructive *intertexte* is a trace without origin, a Chinese intertext is always a trace leading back to the origin, to the fountainhead of tradition, the great thinkers of Taoism and Confucianism. In this sense, the power of Chinese writing transforms the author into authoritative text, and when quoting from ancient writings, there is no difference between quoting, for example, Lao Tzu the author or *Lao Tzu* the book. In the Chinese tradition, therefore, the power of writing as such avenged itself the very moment it was debased; the metaphysical hierarchy was thus already undermined when it was established. Perhaps this is precisely where the *tao* differs from the *logos:* it hardly needed to wait till the twentieth century for the dismantling of phonetic writing, for the Derridean sleight of hand, the strategy of deconstruction.

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic,* trans. A. V. Miller (New York, 1976), p. 32.

2. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics,* trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, Conn., 1959), p. 57.

3. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* vol. 1, *Language,* trans. Manheim (New Haven, Conn., 1953), p. 305.

4. Hegel, *Science of Logic,* p. 107.

5. Heinrich Heine, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland,* ed. Wolfgang Harich (Berlin, 1965), p. 133; my translation.

6. Stephen Ullmann, *The Principles of Semantics* (Oxford, 1963), p. 120.

7. See Qian Zhongshu, *Guan Zhui Bian* [Pipe-awl chapters], 4 vols. (Beijing, 1979), 1:1–8. The four volumes of *Guan Zhui Bian,* written in graceful classical Chinese interspersed with quotations in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Latin, form an immense work of commentaries on ten of the classic works of the Chinese tradition. It is a monumental work of modern scholarship that evinces the author's great learning and his effort to bring the ancient and the modern, Chinese and Western, into mutual illumination. Although this is the magnum opus of Qian's career, it is too recent to be included in Theodore Huters' book, *Qian Zhongshu,* Twayne's World Authors Series (Boston, 1982).

8. See Jacques Derrida, "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology," *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1982), esp. p. 100.

9. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind,* trans. J. B. Baillie, 2d ed. rev. (London, 1949), p. 74.

10. Ibid., p. 340.

11. Ibid., p. 530.

12. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (trans. J. Sibree [New York, 1900], p. 135), quoted in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy,* p. 103.

13. Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), p. 26; all further references to this work will be included in the text.

14. Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,* ed. Ezra Pound, Square Dollar Series (Washington, D.C., 1951), p. 59.

15. Pound, *Confucian Analects* (London, 1956), p. 9.

16. George A. Kennedy, "Fenollosa, Pound, and the Chinese Character," *Selected Works of George A. Kennedy,* ed. Tien-yi Li (New Haven, Conn., 1964), p. 462.

17. T. S. Eliot, intro. to Pound, *Selected Poems* (London, 1928), p. xvii.

18. Ibid., p. xvi.

19. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* ([Hamburg, 1969], par. 459, p. 373), quoted in Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* p. 25; Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character,* p. 59; my italics.

20. Ernest Renan, *Oeuvres complètes* (vol. 8, *De l'origine du langage* [Paris, 1848], p. 90), quoted in Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* p. 123.

21. Joseph N. Riddel, " 'Neo-Nietzschean Clatter'—Speculation and/on Pound's Poetic Image," in *Ezra Pound: Tactics for Reading,* ed. Ian F. A. Bell (London, 1982), p. 211.

22. There are well over forty English translations of the *Lao Tzu,* and the key term *tao* is translated as "way" in many of them. See, e.g., the otherwise excellent translations by Wing-tsit Chan (*The Way of Lao Tzu* [Indianapolis, 1963]) and D. C. Lau (*Tao Te Ching* [Harmondsworth, 1963]; all further references to this work will be to chapter number and will be included in the text).

23. For quotations from the *Lao Tzu,* I generally follow Lau's translation but here have changed the word "way" to *tao.*

24. Sima Qian, quoted in Lau, intro. to *Tao Te Ching,* p. 9.

25. Wei Yuan, *Laozi Ben Yi* [The original meaning of the *Lao Tzu*] (Shanghai, 1955), p. 1; my translation.

26. See Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie,* vol. 5 (Basel and Stuttgart, 1980), s.v. "Logos."

27. Cassirer, *Language and Myth,* trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York, 1946), p. 7.

28. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Kleine Schriften I: Philosophie. Hermeneutik,* 2d ed. (Tübingen, 1967), p. 93; my translation.

29. Plato, quoted in Qian, *Guan Zhui Bian,* 2:410; Qian, *Guan Zhui Bian,* 2:410; my translation.

30. Derrida, *Positions,* trans. Bass (Chicago, 1981), p. 41.

31. Li Dingzuo, ed., *Zhou Yi Jijie* [Variorum edition of the *Book of Changes*], 2 vols. (Shanghai, 1937), 2:353; my translation.

32. Zhuangzi, "Tian Dao" [The *tao* of heaven], *Zhuangzi Jijie* [Variorum edition of the *Chuang Tzu*], ed. Wang Xianqian (Shanghai, 1933), p. 79; my translation. See Chuang Tzu, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu,* trans. Burton Watson (New York, 1968), p. 152.

33. Zhuangzi, "Wai Wu" [External things], *Zhuangzi Jijie,* p. 66; my translation. See Chuang Tzu, *The Complete Works,* p. 302.

34. Heraclitus, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary,* ed. and trans. Charles H. Kahn (Cambridge, 1979), p. 45; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London, 1961), p. 74.

35. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, New York, 1982), pp. 94, 93.

36. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy,* p. 3.

37. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale,* 4th ed. (Paris, 1949), p. 166; my translation.

38. Liu An, *Huai Nan Tzu,* ed. and annotated by Gao You (fl. 205?–212 A.D.), in *Zhuzi Jicheng* [Collection of classics], 8 vols. (Shanghai, 1954), 7:117; my translation.

39. K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 81.